

# THE ORGAN OF

# REFORM

# TEMPERANCE

VOLUME I.

CINCINNATI, O. FRIDAY

OCTOBER 22, 1852.

NUMBER 40.

THE ORGAN OF  
TEMPERANCE REFORM,  
PUBLISHED EVERY FRIDAY,  
BY CALEB CLARK,  
Ben Franklin Printing House,  
Cincinnati, O.

## TERMS:

Single subscriptions, ..... \$1 50  
Clubs of ten and upwards, ..... 1 00  
All subscriptions must be accompanied with the cash, and addressed, postage paid, to

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Ben Franklin Printing House,  
Cincinnati, O.

## SELECT TALE.

### THE SULTAN'S BEAR.

THE sultan being one day rather out of sorts sent for his Jewish physician a man very eminent for skill in his profession, and not less distinguished by his love of his own nation and his desperate enmity to the Christians. Finding that his patient had not really much the matter with him, and thinking a little gossip would not only be more agreeable, but more likely to do him good, than any medicine which could be prescribed, the doctor began to discourse on the very familiar topic of his highness's favorite bear, which was lying at his feet, and whose virtues and abilities he was never tired of extolling.

'You would wonder,' said the sultan, 'not only at the natural sagacity of the creature, and the tact which he shows in a thousand different ways, but at the amount of knowledge he has collected, and the logical correctness with which he uses it. He is really a very knowing beast.' The Jew politely acquiesced in all this and much more; but at length added: 'It is well that such a clever animal is in such good hands. If his extraordinary talents are not developed to the utmost, they are at least not perverted and made a bad use of.'

'I hope not indeed,' said the sultan. 'But what do you mean by his talents not being developed? or in what way would they be likely to be perverted in bad hands?'

'Fardon me,' said the Jew; 'I have spoken rashly before your sublime highness—such things should not be talked of; but it is natural that, although I know very little about them, I should consider the practice and the purpose bad, when they belong to what I consider a bad people: at the same time, if your sublime highness thinks fit to tolerate them, it is not for your faithful slave to say a word about it. I should be sorry that your sublime highness should not extend to your Christian subjects the same toleration and paternal kindness my own people enjoy.'

'What in the world do you mean?' said the sultan. 'What have the Christians to do with my bear?'

'Nothing at all,' replied the Jew with great earnestness; and he added, with a sigh, 'that is the very thing I am thankful for. It is such a remarkable creature, that there is no saying what might come of it.'

'Come of what?' said the sultan.

'Why,' said the Jew, in a humble and very confidential tone, 'your sublime highness is of course aware, that among the many curious secrets the Christians possess, they have one which enables them to teach bears to read.'

'You don't say so?' exclaimed the sultan. 'How do they contrive it?'

'Ah,' replied the Jew with an internal shudder, 'that is more than I can tell your sublime highness. I don't suppose that half-a-dozen of your subjects, except themselves, are aware of the fact; and few even among the Christians know the secret. I only obtained the little knowledge I have by accidental circumstances, which put me upon the inquiry; and I was a long while before I could feel perfectly certain that they actually did the thing. Once they did it, and, well, I have never been able to learn. It is one of their greatest secrets, one of their deepest, and therefore, I suspect, one of their most pernicious mysteries. I do not suppose that any man among them would confess it to save his life—not even the old patriarch, if he were put to the rack.'

'Is it very strange,' said the sultan, after a pause.

'It is wonderful,' said the physician with much emphasis.

'What is the harm of it?' exclaimed the sultan abruptly after a pause. 'Why should not bears read as well as men, if they are capable of learning?'

'Most true and most wisely said,' replied the Jew. 'If they were taught to read good books, it would probably mend their manners. But if that were all, why should they be so much mystery about it? why should they so stoutly deny it? and again, to shock his head, and shudder. But being fully persuaded that he had gained his point, he thought it safest to change the subject; and accordingly he did so as soon as he had emphatically and earnestly entreated the sultan not to say a word of the secret. He had been led to impart, or, at all events, not to let it be known that he had given any information on the subject.

When the doctor was gone, the sultan fell into a reverie on the advantages and disadvantages of his bear learning to read. When he went to bed, the same train of thought kept him awake; and after a sleepless night, he sent early in the morning for the patriarch. The venerable Mar Yusuf, last time in opening the summons, taking his patriarchal staff in his hand, and followed by his two deacons with their heads bare, and their hands crossed on their

wards, if he likes it, and don't let them give him any thing to eat, and take care not to be out of the way—that is a good fellow.'

'You may depend upon me,' said Timothy; and thus went off to the church, to be about a lecture, for the bear to study, though, to say the truth, not entirely, or even principally, with that intention; for he did not mean that his pupil should commence that day, or the next; and he was in no doubt which to choose among many old lectures that had been laid aside.

There was an immense one, with great brass knobs and corners, out of which he had himself learned to chant long before he could lift it, and indeed, now that he was come to man's estate, it was as much as he could carry. This book he meant to use; but for the present he contented himself with observing from the window the bear coming to school in procession; and when he was satisfied that his pupil was in safe custody, he descended from the church-tower, and went to see after him. When he came to the door of the apartment, he waited a moment to listen to what seemed an interchange of any thing but civilities between Timothy and his charge. Titus called out to his colleague; and, without going in himself, looked the door, and put the key in his pocket.

'Won't you go in and look at him?' said Timothy, as they went down the staircase together.

'Time enough,' said Titus; 'he will be better by himself just at present. Had you much trouble in getting him in? How did he behave?'

'Rather restive,' replied Timothy; 'but we managed it among us. Should not he have something to eat?'

'No,' said Titus; 'he has got plenty of water; he will do very well. But now come and help me down with the old dictionary from the upper vestry, for I don't think I can get it down that staircase myself.'

Between them the dictionary was safely brought down, and deposited on the table in the apartment, which we may now call the school-room, but in the chamber of Titus, on a massy oak desk or lectern, which turned upon its pedestal and which they brought out from the patriarch's library for the purpose.

It was well that the school-room was rather remote, and had thick walls; for, missing his supper, the bear naturally became not only hungry, but savage; growled in the most ferocious manner, and rampaged about his cage like a fury. But he got nothing by it; and when he had drunk up the water, and exhausted his powers of growling and raging, he went to sleep. In the morning, Titus brought him a new fresh water and a cake of barley-bread; but in the afternoon, thinking it was now time for his pupil—who was tolerably tame after his untoward exercise and fasting—to begin his lessons, he brought with him the great book he had prepared for his use, and placed it open on the desk, which now stood before the horizontal opening between the bars already described. All the morning had been employed in preparing the desk and the book; and the former was now so contrived that, by means of a screw, the latter could be raised or lowered at pleasure. The book was no longer placed before the opening, at the distance of a few inches, than the bear, which was on the look-out to what he was going forward, began to sniff and poke and snatched a most eager desire to reach it. In fact, all along the lines of large letters, which were widely divided by the musical staves, the tutor, well knowing the taste of his pupil, had stuck little figs, dates, raisins, almonds, morsels of cake, comfits, and dried fruits; in short, all such little sweet things as bears so particularly delight in.

The book was placed, at such a height and distance, that the pupil could only reach the top line, and he had to stretch his neck and clear it, gave promise that he would prove an apt scholar in that branch of learning. One page only was thus prepared for him; for at that period of his education it would have been impossible, without harsh measures than his tutor wished to adopt, to prevent him from cross-readings, which would greatly have diminished his scholarship.

Some minor offenses, such, for instance, as inordinate efforts to begin upon a second line before he had regularly pursued the first, were punished by withholding him on the nose, turning the double desk round—in which case it presented him with a mirror, that frightened him dreadfully—or even, in case of perverseness, leaving him to himself, without giving him the substantial honey-cake, which always rewarded a well said lesson. In a short time the parties began to understand one another, and as Titus had prudently taken care to be in his pupil's power, he was soon gaining his confidence. The bear who, like all his race, had an ardent love for such dainties, found that he was welcome to eat all he could get, if he did but do it in a decent methodical manner. He soon learned, therefore, to take each line as it came; and, indeed, after a short time, his instructor not only ventured to cover the lines of the two open pages at the same time, but by enlarging the opening in front of his ear, he put it in his pupil's power to go on from one line to another without the book being raised; and after the tutor had for a week or two turned the leaf when necessary, the pupil began to shew that, if it was not done for him, he could do it for himself.

As the time drew on, the patriarch was most anxious to know, but did not venture to ask, how matters were going on. At length he summoned courage, and put the question, somewhat indirectly, to Titus; and although he received no particulars, yet he could not help feeling comforted by the cheerful manner in which his affectionate deacon assured him that every thing was going on right, and that he need have no fear for the result.

In the meantime, the sultan, though less

anxious, was intensely curious to see what would come of the matter and frequently entered into conversation on the subject with his physician, who was on somewhat different grounds, still more anxious than himself. His sublime highness, however, who could not expect from a Jew much information respecting the secrets and mysteries of the Christians, rather confined the discourse between them to the physiological part of the subject, expressing his wonder—first, that bears should be able to learn to read; and, secondly, that such a capacity was not more frequently cultivated, asking him, whether he had ever himself heard a bear read? The doctor, in parliamentary fashion, blinked the question; observing that as it was done by secret practices, and no doubt for wicked purposes, it was best to say as little as possible about it. His sublime highness was not altogether satisfied, but comforted himself with thinking that time would soon throw light on the matter.

At length the day arrived when the bear's proficiency was to be put to the test. The sultan was on a drive in his hall of audience; his ministers and officers of state stood on either side; and behind him knelt his Jewish physician, who assumed that position, because, although he would not have failed, even at the hazard of his life, to be present, yet he had no strict right to be there; and, moreover, he did not particularly wish to be seen in the business. All were in breathless expectation when the Christian procession entered. The patriarch walked first, with the creator in his hand next came Titus, the tutor, bowed down on either side, and behind him knelt his Jewish physician, who assumed that position, because, although he would not have failed, even at the hazard of his life, to be present, yet he had no strict right to be there; and, moreover, he did not particularly wish to be seen in the business. All were in breathless expectation when the Christian procession entered. 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